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Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

10 October 1984

USSR-NORTH KOREA: COURTSHIP WILTS FOLLOWING THE KIM VISIT

Summary

North Korean leader Kim Il-song's visit to Moscow in late May failed to give a new impetus to Moscow's two-year long courtship of P'yongyang, and subsequently Soviet interest in wooing the North appears to have diminished. The Soviets apparently remain unconvinced that P'yongyang's warmer atmospherics reflect a willingness by the North to moderate substantially its pro-Beijing stance on international issues of concern to the Kremlin. Soviet preoccupation with internal politicking may also have helped erode its political initiative, or the post-Andropov leadership may have deliberately relegated North Korea to a back burner position while it focuses attention and resources on relations with the US and Western Europe. [ ]

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Meanwhile, the Soviets must find disquieting P'yongyang's moves to improve relations with the West even as it expresses interest in closer ties to Moscow. P'yongyang may be testing the limits of Moscow's willingness to strengthen ties, particularly with a new North Korean economic plan and a political succession in the offing. [ ]

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This memorandum was prepared by [ ] of the Third World Activities Division, Office of Soviet Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Office of East Asia Analysis. Questions and comments are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Third World Activities, SOVA [ ]

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### The Kim Visit

Both the Soviets and the North Koreans probably anticipated that the May-June visit of Kim Il-song to the USSR and Eastern Europe would be a high point in Moscow's two-year courtship of North Korea. Prior to the visit, the Soviets upgraded the level of delegations to North Korean anniversary celebrations, endorsed the North Korean position on sensitive international issues such as the IPU meetings in Seoul and the Rangoon bombings, moved incrementally towards acknowledgement of a Kim Chong-il succession, and possibly provided the North with Scud surface-to-surface missiles.\*

Moscow probably expected some firm indication during the visit that P'yongyang had decided to moderate its pro-Beijing tilt. The visit did provide a forum for wide-ranging bilateral discussions, but apparently no agreements were signed. Moscow failed to endorse either P'yongyang's proposal for tripartite talks between Washington, Seoul and P'yongyang or Kim's succession arrangements, and Kim did not follow Soviet leader Chernenko in sharply criticizing US, Japanese and Chinese policies in Asia. [ ]

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We have no evidence to suggest that Moscow agreed to major new arms transfers or an increase in military assistance either during or after the visit. [ ]

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### The Aftermath

Following the visit, Moscow's courtship appears to have stalled, at least temporarily.

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- [REDACTED]
- Soviet media coverage and messages for the anniversaries of the USSR-North Korea defense treaty and Korea's liberation in July and August were comparable to Soviet treatment of these events before the courtship began. Moscow's coolness was especially notable in view of the warmth of North Korean messages to Moscow on both occasions.
  - The amount of attention Moscow devoted to the North's mid-September National Day celebrations this year was no greater than the pre-courtship coverage of 1982. The level of Soviet representation at celebrations held in North Korea's Moscow embassy remained basically the same as before and was substantially lower than the delegation dispatched by the Chinese to the North's embassy festivities in Beijing.
  - Since late last spring, the Soviets took no major step to recognize the Kim Chong-il succession, which progressed after the elder Kim's return, until Moscow's ambassador reportedly requested a meeting with the younger Kim in late September. The Soviets meanwhile continue to use toasts and greetings by their East European allies, during anniversary celebrations in both P'yongyang and East European capitals, as a way of indirectly acknowledging Kim Chong-il's leadership status as they have since 1983. [REDACTED]

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Neither the USSR nor its allies have made significant new economic offerings to the North in the aftermath of the Kim visit.

- The Soviets have not been forthcoming on the North's request for reactors for its atomic energy program, claiming that no assistance can even be considered before 1990.

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[REDACTED]

We do not believe that the annual Soviet-North Korean economic and S&T talks held in Moscow in September produced major new economic projects, although there probably was some agreement to expand existing projects such as Siberian forestry joint ventures and to provide more training for North Korean scientific and technical cadres. A TASS release replayed in Pravda described the agenda for the routine session chiefly in terms of economic issues that

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predated Kim's visit and labeled the atmosphere "friendly and businesslike"--a formulation Moscow often uses to suggest disagreement over key issues. [REDACTED]

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P'yongyang meanwhile continues to send signals to the Soviets that it remains interested in closer ties. North Korea showcased its interest in its media treatment of both the defense treaty and liberation day anniversaries. North Korean motivations and timing appear to us to be very much tied to its economic planning cycle. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, the Soviets must find disquieting current North Korean moves to improve relations with the West, notably Japan and the US. In the first instance, the North's recent efforts--its conciliatory steps towards the South, its expressions of interest in US and South Korean proposals for reducing tensions--seem designed to reinvigorate the tripartite talks proposal. P'yongyang's preoccupation with its economic problems as it moves towards a new development plan explain the recent promulgation of a new law on joint ventures and gestures towards Tokyo. In both instances, however, the North probably also perceives steps to improve relations with the West as a way of putting some pressure on Moscow to be more forthcoming with offers of assistance and recognition of the succession.

#### Soviet Motives

Soviet stalling tactics in dealing with P'yongyang since May suggest a decision to await tangible movement in the North's policies before making further commitments. Soviet offers of substantial material assistance are probably contingent on some demonstrable sign that P'yongyang is prepared, for example, to actively back Moscow on Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea, to fully endorse the Soviet line on Afghanistan, or to invite Moscow to play a role in arranging talks on the future of the peninsula. [REDACTED]

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Neither Kim's endorsement of some Soviet international positions in his late March TASS interview, nor his extremely guarded responses to General Secretary Chernenko's welcoming speech at the state banquet in May, nor the

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[redacted]

noticeably warmer messages from P'yongyang during various summer-fall anniversary celebrations apparently satisfy Soviet demands. The North Koreans believe that Moscow remains piqued by P'yongyang's proposal for tripartite talks--which does not recognize a Soviet voice in deciding the peninsula's future--and the Soviets almost certainly were displeased when Kim again endorsed the Democratic Kampuchean forces during the Yugoslav leg of his Soviet-East European tour. [redacted]

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A more general disarray within the Soviet leadership, arising as a consequence of Chernenko's ill health, his inability to consolidate his power, and the current maneuvering for the next succession, may also play an important but secondary role in the wilting of the courtship. The courtship blossomed most visibly during Andropov's brief tenure in office. The absence of significant Soviet moves since his death may mean that the current leaders have moved North Korea to a back burner position while they focus their attention and resources on policy toward the US and Western Europe. [redacted]

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#### Implications

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[redacted]

If the lull in the courtship represents a deliberate tactic on Moscow's part, the Soviets probably will continue to stall on substantial new offerings of economic or military assistance while awaiting signs of a North Korean political shift. We believe such a dramatic shift is unlikely so long as P'yongyang is willing only to restore some balance to its relationship with its two Communist neighbors rather than to tilt definitively towards Moscow. Should the Soviets continue to withhold major new economic or military assistance into 1985--as P'yongyang attempts to pin down major project assistance for its next development plan--the North might conceivably be encouraged to press its efforts, which China applauds, to open up to the West. [redacted]

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A sustained North Korean effort to improve its relations with South Korea, Japan, and the US, however, might encourage the Soviets to resume their wooing with material offerings. The Soviets remain sensitive to signs that they might become "odd man out" in settlements affecting the future of Asia. Under such circumstances they might, for example, use the promised delivery of F-16s to the South in 1986 as a pretext for at least token deliveries of

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advanced weapons systems to the North as a way of building some political influence. [REDACTED]

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Alternatively, to the extent that the courtship has wilted because of Soviet leadership uncertainties, North Korean moves by themselves are not likely to get the ball rolling. A resumption of Moscow's courtship is not likely until the Soviet succession stabilizes and a new leadership focuses on North Korea as an important element in Soviet Asian policy or Sino-Soviet relations. [REDACTED]

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Meanwhile, Moscow's delay in publicly backing the Kim Chong-il succession, at a time when the transfer of power is progressing, may already have generated a lingering resentment within the North Korean leadership that will limit Soviet political influence in P'yongyang for the foreseeable future. [REDACTED]

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